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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5399
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3127
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2992
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1043
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: NOHUR TRIBE DOMINATES TRADE AND SERVICES IN ASHGABAT

REF: ASHGABAT 671

¶1. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Nohurs, members of a tribe from southwest Turkmenistan, have been flourishing in trade and restaurant businesses in Ashgabat since 2004, when former Minister of National Security Ashyrmuhammedov, a member of the Nohur tribe, was appointed to the position. Nohurs own a number of large restaurants in Ashgabat and engage mostly in retail trade. Nohur dominance in trade and services can be explained not only by their strong work ethic, but also by their strong familial relations and protection by law enforcement officials, many of whom are fellow Nohurs. By employing aggressive business tactics against non-Nohurs in trade and services, they squeeze their competitors out of the marketplace. END SUMMARY.

STRONG FAMILY TIES

¶3. (SBU) Turkmenistan's retail trade and services sector is dominated by Nohurs. Nohur is a small tribe located in Kopetdag mountains in Southwest Turkmenistan (reftel). Presently, most restaurants and a significant share of retail trade in Ashgabat is run by Nohurs. Many people see the reason for their concentration in such profitable sectors of economy as trade and services not only in their good business skills but also in strong familial relations. For instance, if one Nohur succeeds in a business, he would involve his family members and relatives, but not employ any outsiders.

BIG BROTHER PROTECTION

¶4. (SBU) Yet, the strong family ties among Nohurs are not the main reason for their ascendancy in private business/entrepreneurship. The main reason is the protection of their "Big Brother" former Minister of National Security General Geldimurat Ashyrmuhammedov, also a Nohur. (Most high government officials are members

of the Ahal Teke tribe, which is the dominant tribe in Turkmenistan.) Ashyrmuhammedov, who served as Minister from 2004 to 2007, was a person trusted and promoted by President Niyazov himself. Before Ashyrmuhammedov became the Minister of National Security, he served in Niyazov's presidential security guard and was Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD). According to a local source, "it was during his tenure as MVD chief that many Nohurs were employed by the Ministry. Those Nohurs now, as mid-level officials of the MVD, provide a "krysha" (literally a "roof," meaning protection) for their Nohur relatives engaged in trade or restaurant businesses. These days, the following well-known Ashgabat restaurants and cafes are run by Nohurs: two "Shazada" cafes in central Ashgabat, "Erzurum" Turkish restaurant, "Shokoladnitsa" cafe, "Toy Mekany" restaurant used mostly for weddings and big events as well as a restaurant in the Univermag Shopping Center, similar to Toy Mekany, Paytagt Restaurant, and a number of small cafes in Ashgabat. The co-owner of the Pizza House restaurant is also a Nohur. At the Tolkuchka Bazaar on the outskirts of Ashgabat, Nohurs allegedly collude against non-Nohurs by agreeing to lower the prices for goods they sell, in order to squeeze out other traders. Nohurs have found their own niche in the automobile spare parts trade and the MTS cell phone operating business.

NOHUR ROOTS AND FEATURES

15. (SBU) Nohur village is a four-hour drive west of

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Ashgabat, located at 3,380 feet elevation in the Kopetdag mountains. Along with their distinctive lifestyle, Nohurs retained unique national handicrafts and architecture. Locals think that Nohur family ties are strong because Nohur men marry only Nohur women to maintain the purity of the tribe. Nohurs, like most Turkmen, are Muslim. Nevertheless, most Nohurs are considered to be very strict (unlike most other Turkmen, who are semi-secular) with regard to practicing their religion.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Natives of a small village, Nohurs are a cohesive minority tribe, and therefore, help each other to succeed in business against larger tribes. Yet, they also owe a good deal of their recent success in trade and services to their kinsman, former Minister of National Security Ashyrmuhammedov. From all appearances, Nohurs will continue to prosper in private business as long as their kinsmen occupy influential positions in the law enforcement agencies. END COMMENT.

MILES